

53-year-old \$20 bill still legal tender

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from readers.

Q—Could I spend a \$20 bill printed 53 years ago? A grocery-store clerk refused to take my money, claiming that it had been "discontinued."

J.R., Chicago

A—All U.S. currency issued by Uncle Sam under the U.S. Constitution remains legal tender. Your bill is worth \$20 as "spending money" and it might bring even more as a collectible, depending on the amount of wear and other factors.

Q—Is "one troy ounce of gold" the same as "one ounce of gold"?

S.A., Hammond, Ind.

A—Yes. "Troy" is a classification of weights for precious metals. Hobbyists often omit the word in casual references to coins because gold and silver weights almost always are in the troy system.

A "troy ounce" is slightly heavier than the much more common "avoirdupois ounce," which businesses use to measure many other types of products sold in the United States. Thus, a one-ounce American Eagle silver dollar is heavier than a one-ounce candy bar!

Q—A friend says the government once put silver in nickels. Is that true? If so, what years are special?

R.E., Elmhurst

A—During much of World War II, the U.S. Treasury made five-cent coins out of copper, silver and manganese to conserve nickel [the metal] for weapons. Many Jefferson nickels [the coins] dated 1942 and all of those minted between 1943 and 1945 each contain .056 ounce of silver, worth nearly 40 cents at current commodity prices.

Q—I'd like to buy a 1953 proof set to surprise my husband on our anniversary. Please send me the address of the United States Mint.

M.M., Richardson, Texas

A—Sorry, but the government normally sells coin sets made during the current year or most recent past years. You'd have to order the 1953 set from a coin dealer; expect to pay at least \$140.